Amherst Health Department Social Justice Project

Meeting with
Amherst Select Board

Agenda

- Introduction and overview of project
- Background and Project Description
- Goals of the Project
- Activities of the Project
- Next Steps
- Q & A

Overview of the Project:

This project provides a vehicle through which members of Amherst Town Government can identify, examine and develop a plan for changing behaviors, policies and practices that contribute to differential and inequitable life outcomes and daily life experiences for people from different social identity groups (race/ethnicity/national origin, gender, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, ability, language) that are manifested in differential health outcomes.

Background of the Project

- Data indicate that there are still gross inequalities in health outcomes and health status for different groups of Americans based on race, gender and socio-economic class.

- Analyses of the data suggest that these gross disparities in health outcomes can be changed through the work of public policy and practice and organizations that have an impact on the health outcomes of Americans.

- This project is an opportunity to determine whether departments of Amherst town government, working together on some common goals, can change health outcomes and produce greater health equity for the citizens of Amherst.

Goals of the project

In this project, we will

1. implement a dialogue process in the departments of Town Government to explore current and potential practices with regard to social justice issues as root causes of health inequities;

2. identify potential practices that will enable varied Departments within Town Government to act more effectively on root causes;

3. support town Government in moving toward a social justice orientation.

Project activities

- The project includes a series of dialogue sessions examining issues of social justice and health equity. Representatives from each Department of Town government would participate in this dialogue to consider the impact of issues of social justice on health outcomes and to determine practices that can be undertaken by departments of Town government that have potential for changing health outcomes.

- A simultaneous leader's dialogue for heads of Departments of Town Government will provide an opportunity for Department Heads to become familiar with the dialogue process and to examine issues of social justice and differential health outcomes.

- Following these dialogue sessions, a series of recommendations for changes in policy and practices of the departments of Town government would be presented and discussed with Town Government Department heads.

- Department Heads will examine the extent to which recommendations for action could be implemented in their respective departments.

- All relevant personnel in the varied departments of Town government would receive an orientation about the proposed changes and support in the adoption of the proposed changes in practice.

- Ongoing opportunities will be organized to raise awareness of social justice issues and health equity for citizens of Amherst.

- A mechanism to measure community health equity over time will be created, implemented and monitored.

Basic assumptions of the project

- Health is an end in itself, an asset or resource required by everyone and critical to human development and well-functioning communities

- Equity in health status benefits everyone.

- Health is a social concept, not only a medical one, and therefore would be usefully defined broadly, for example, demonstrating its connection to quality of life and well-being.

Basic Assumptions cont.

- Population health outcomes are primarily the result of social and political forces, not lifestyles or behavior.

- Health is a collective public good, actively produced by institutions and social policies.

- An accumulation of negative social conditions and lack of fundamental resources contribute to health inequities,
  - economic and social insecurity,
  - racial and gender inequality,
  - lack of participation and influence in society,
  - unfavorable conditions during childhood, absence of quality and affordable housing,
  - unhealthy conditions in the workplace
  - lack of control over the work process
  - toxic environments,
  - inequitable distribution of public goods.

- Addressing health inequities effectively will require an emphasis on root causes and social injustice, the latter having to do with inequality and hierarchical divisions within the population

Recommendations and Strategies

- For immediate implementation: organize a Social Justice Committee to oversee and manage the implementation of the recommendations and strategies agreed to during today's session (October 9).

- Town of Amherst Employees and social justice
  - Recruiting People of Color for Town employment
  - The Town staff should reflect the population make-up of the Town.
  - A recruitment plan with specific strategies for recruitment of Pele of Color will be developed.
  - A follow up plan to examine the quality of life for recruited employees once they are on board with the Town.
  - Be sure that the plan includes strategies to support their success once on board and to support their continued growth and professional development.

- Social Justice Assessment: Analyze all projects in the Town with a social justice lens as well as a lens for economies.

Recommendations, cont.

- Work more effectively with the Schools to create community centers.

- Staff Training
  - Provide social justice training for all town employees.
  - Provide sensitivity training to all supervisors and managers
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- The Town 250 Celebration: Invite all parts of the community to participate in the 250 celebration. Devise a plan to insure the participation of these varied segments of the community.

- Encourage People of Color and low income people to sit on Boards, Commissions and other avenues for participation in Town government

Projects Next Steps

- Community leaders planning sessions

- Continued community dialogues

- Town viewings of Unnatural Causes

- Creating a local mechanism for measuring community health equity over time—one that links health outcomes to access to social resources and differences in power and privilege based on race, class and gender

Next steps

- Administering community needs assessment (survey and focus groups)
- Town viewings of community stories told through digital storytelling (potential Partnership with UMASS School of Public Health)
- Community and employee training
- Supporting communities in their identified needs (from survey and needs assessment)